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HOW A RELIGION GREW IN JAPAN

EDMUND BUCKLEY, PH.D.
The University of Chicago

Great interest attaches to the period of childhood, whether of persons or of institutions, because then the self-expression is most simple and direct, and therefore the nature is most readily comprehensible to others. Children and fools speak the truth; others have learned, for weal or for woe, to conceal it. In the case of religion this childhood is often inaccessible, either because no record at all remains, or because the record has been expurgated, interpreted, and otherwise improved almost beyond recognition. Of all the religions upon earth, Shintoism, the native faith of the Japanese, has been most fortunate in this respect; for its votaries suddenly learned the art of writing from the neighboring Chinese, and were thus enabled to turn its oral traditions and rituals into permanent record while it was still in the days of its youth, early in the seventh century A. D. Had someone done the same for the native British and German faiths, what a welcome light the record would now throw upon our own past! But, in lack of them, we shall turn with all the more interest to the *Kojiki* or "Ancient Records," and *Yengishiki* or "Ceremonial Law," of the early Japanese at a period before either Confucianism or Buddhism had gained a foothold in their land; for the traditions are, of course, vastly older than the record of them, and go back to at least the first century B. C.

Both *Kojiki* and *Yengishiki* show that the two tap-roots of Shintoism were ancestor-worship and nature-worship, and both of these cults remain alive today, though destined to experience reinterpretation at the hands of science and in the presence of more advanced faiths. The theory supporting ancestorism is that the blessed dead live on in another state, wherein they still need service from the living and can tender ghostly help in return. This phase of the native faith was early appropriated by Buddhism, which used tablets to represent the deceased, and daily offered to them a tiny portion of rice and of

tea, while a light was kept burning before them at night, in the shrine where they stood beside the images of Buddhist deities.

Above this family cult stands that of the clan-ancestor, or perhaps the clan-lord, called the *Ujigami*, which cult is carried on in a district temple. Hither the child is brought when one month old, to be placed under the protection of the god, and regularly thereafter on holy days, which here are also holidays, when tumblers, conjurers, artists in colored sand, and venders of toys and candies, gather in and around the temple grounds. These grounds serve the child also as playground, and in some provinces the god receives his votary's last call as he leaves and his first as he returns to his native place. Thus does this simple faith gather strength by close and constant association with everyday life. Finally, to die is not to perish, but to be gathered to the fathers gone before; unless, indeed, it be the good fortune to die on flood or field shouting "Banzai" for the emperor or "Nippon" for the fatherland, in which case the soul gathers, with those of others fallen in war, to the *Shokonsha* or "Spirit-Invoking Temple." The thousands of heroes lately departed to Manchuria express no hope of returning with glory, but only of winning remembrance at this Japanese Valhalla.

But above these clan-shrines in turn, stand the temples devoted to those great gods that sprang from nature-worship. The greatest of the nature-deities have been claimed as parents—either by natural or by magical generation—of the first mortal ancestors of the ruling families in Japan; so that in these cases ancestor-worship and nature-worship have fused to produce the most powerful effect possible. Thus, the Mikado traces his descent from Amaterasu O Mikami, "Heaven-Shining August Deity," that is, the sun-goddess; for, in the Shintoist conception, that great luminary is feminine, probably because mythically interpreted in contrast with the rainstorm, taken as the unruly brother of Amaterasu and named Susano, the "Impetuous Male." Again, the chief priest of the great shrine at Kidzuki—the second holiest in Japan—traces his ancestry to this very Susano, and until the revolution in 1868 was for that very reason considered an *ikigami*, a living god.

The cycle of Japanese myth begins with Izanagi and Izanami, or Heaven and Earth, as a primitive creative pair, who begat the numer-



PROCESSIONAL CAR TO AMATERASU, "HEAVEN-SHINER"

The red sun floats upon green clouds over the effigy (not an idol). Below are the cocks sacred to Amaterasu. The first stage is occupied by musicians.

ous Japanese islands—grown enormously since birth—and various deities. The story of even this early myth contains reference to the yet older phallicism, the worship of the universal forces of nature under the symbolism of the generative organs. This form of nature-worship

has sometimes led to licentious rites, but was commonly used simply to promote growth in flocks and in fields. When Izanagi had incurred pollution from the corpse of Izanagi, he washed himself from it and thereby produced from his left eye—left is the more important in Japan—Amaterasu, the Sun-goddess; from his right eye, Tsuki Yomi, the moon-god; and from his nostrils Susano, the rainstorm-god. This transparent and picturesque myth then continues that Amaterasu, affronted by her brother's misconduct, retired into a cave (eclipse), until enticed out again by a mirror which reflected her beauty. The cock that crows in the morn is sacred to her, the mirror is her symbol and she receives daily homage from clapping hands as she begins day for the world by rising upon Dainippon, "Great Sunrise Land," from no one knows where. The preaching of Shinto priests makes Amaterasu O Mikami the great exemplar of cleanness and propriety to all mortals. She ever remains the maiden fair, for her child, Ame-no-oshi-ho-mimi, who became ancestor of the mikado, was produced by magic from her necklace.

The myth of Susano is likewise interesting. For his misconduct to Amaterasu he was expelled from heaven (rain falls) and, upon reaching earth, rescued a maid from the red dragon that would devour her, by giving him wine (water extinguishes fire). The sword taken from this dragon's tail (steel is forged in the fire) became the "Herb-queller" famous in subsequent story.

When Amaterasu saw her land in need, she sent down from heaven her grandchild, Ninigi, to rule it. He descended with a large retinue in great pomp upon the island of Kyushu at a place "opposite to the land of Korea." This and other curious clues indicate that this irruption of the conquering clan was made from Korea; and, once upon Japanese soil, it worked northward until it had subdued all the indigenous tribes, and thus founded the Japanese nation. Thus do the myths connect with traditions, which in turn yield to annals, and these at last to history. Besides many other great gods, there were inferior ones too numerous to cite, eighty myriads in all, and new ones are added by imperial edict as the centuries roll by.

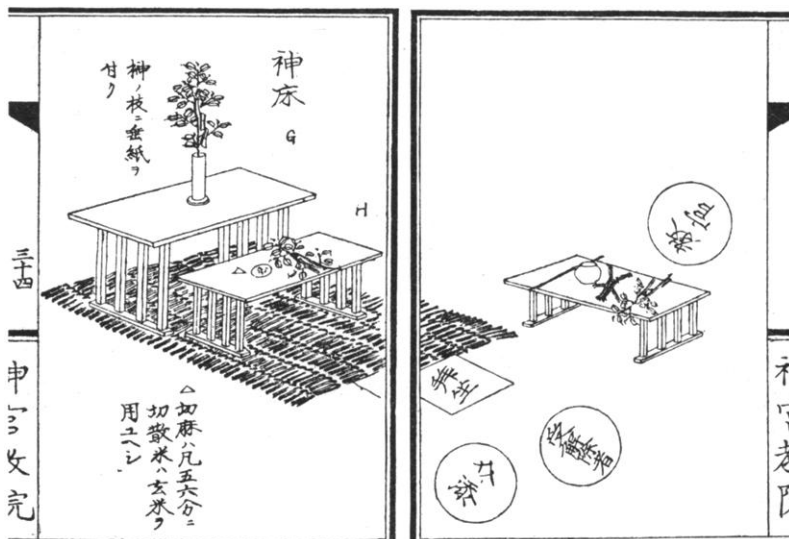
The interest of the *Yengishiki* lies in the perfectly transparent nature of its rituals. As will be observed in the following example, a ritual simply states the grounds upon which the offerings—always



SHINTO PRIEST CARRYING A GOHEL, THE SACRED SYMBOL OF SHINTOISM

the chief thing in primitive worship—are made; namely, in order to secure some natural benefit, or, as in other rituals, because of some benefit already received, or the like. The ritual is always an intelligible proposition, with nothing occult or mystical about it, any more than there is about human affairs.

I declare in the presence of the Sovran Gods of the Harvest: If the Sovran Gods will bestow in many-bundled ears and in luxuriant ears the late-ripening harvest which they will bestow, . . . then I will fulfil their praises by setting



IMPLEMENTS USED IN THE PURIFICATION RITE

Place for worship Priest's place
 Attendant's place Votary's place

up the first-fruits in a thousand ears and in many hundred ears. Raising high the wine-jars, filling and ranging in rows the bellies of the wine-jars, I will present them in juice and in ear.

The famous *Obarai*, or "Great Purification," affords an exception to this quest for merely natural good. It enumerates various moral and ceremonial offenses, and states that when the priest shall request all the gods to hear, shall cut some branches and rushes into shreds for subsequent dispersion, and shall make certain offerings, to be thrown away later, the gods in heaven and earth will listen, while the gods of the rapids, sea, etc., will carry the offenses away. This puri-

fication rite was performed before each and all of the great seasonal rites at the national temple to Amaterasu in Ise province. In a *Kaijo*, or purification rite for special occasions, the applicant was measured with a bamboo stick, brushed with a spray of evergreen *sakaki*, and then himself breathed upon a straw manikin. These three articles were then tied up in a jar, which was thrown by the



SACRED DANCERS IN THE KAGURA OR PEACE OFFERING

votary into the nearest stream, in the belief that in this manner any offenses he might have committed were carried away, together with all the evil consequences they would involve.

Another type of ritual performed at the temples at any time, at the request and expense of an applicant, is the *Kagura*. The service consists of placing food and drink, to an accompaniment of music and dancing, upon the altar of the deity, of reciting an offertory to the deity, and finally of transferring the food and drink to the votary, who carries them home, there to consume them at convenience. This rite is manifestly a peace-offering, just as the purification rite

is a sin-offering, and the harvest rite a thank-offering, to the deity concerned; and no witness of them can for a moment doubt that they give satisfaction to the faithful observer.

Nothing can be more impressively solemn than the great Shintoist temples; for they are modeled upon the antique wooden house, they receive a perfection of finish which only the Japanese craftsman can give, and they are usually located in some noble grove of trees. Hither pilgrims wend their way from homes scores or hundreds of miles distant, hoping to secure success in their calling by a visit at least once in the lifetime to one of the great national shrines, especially at Ise or Kidzuki. On their return these pilgrims carry with them an amulet of paper or wood bearing the name of the deity, thenceforward to be kept in sight upon the *kamidana*, or "god-shelf," which is attached to the wall of some room at about six feet from the floor. Here it rests with other sacred objects, varying according to local custom, and here all receive three times a month offerings of rice and wine, while every night a tiny lamp burns before them.

This primitive religion never used idols; for its nature-gods were, and sometimes still are, worshiped in the open, while its ancestral gods are represented by some personal belonging—a sword, mirror, or the like—to which a pillow is often added as evidence that the deity abides in the shrine.

Shintoism never devised any moral code, since its complete fusion with the state required that it point to the laws of the mikado as the first duty of man, after observing which he might follow the dictates of his own heart, which, being good, would always lead him aright. But the conception is potent also for any special occasions that arise, as when suicide over a great waterfall near Nikko is forbidden by an inscription which reminds would-be suicides that their lives belong, not to themselves, but to the mikado, and that they should not be wasted to gratify a whim or to relieve anxiety or disappointment, but should be devoted to the service of their country. Another such opportunity for exercising the combined influence of religion and government upon morality is afforded at special occasions in the public schools when the imperial edict is read, and that with more reverence than is now accorded the Bible in America, which, moreover, is not read in our schools—nor anything else in its place. The edict recites that



RELIGIOUS PROCESSION IN KYOTO

The procession is Shintoish, as the *gonbei* show. The car is usually occupied by musicians and *geisha*.

the imperial ancestors founded their authority on the principles of humanity and justice, that the imperial subjects have ever deserved well; and then continues:

You, our subjects, be therefore filial to your parents; be affectionate to your brothers; be harmonious as husbands and wives; and be faithful to your friends;

conduct yourselves with propriety and carefulness; extend generosity and benevolence toward your neighbors; . . . be always found in the good observance of the laws and constitution of the land; display your personal courage and public spirit for the sake of the country whenever required; and thus support the imperial prerogative, which is coexistent with the heaven and the earth.

Such conduct on your part will not only strengthen the character of our good and loyal subjects, but conduce also to the maintenance of the fame of your worthy forefathers. . . .

We hope, therefore, that we and our subjects will regard the sacred precepts with one and the same heart in order to attain the same ends.

Divination of the future is practiced in various ways. A primitive method was to roast a deer's shoulderblade and to interpret the cracks on the same principle that a palmist does the lines of the hand. Nowadays wooden sticks numbered to correspond with a schedule are drawn at chance from a box. Divination through a medium in hypnotic trance is used by certain clubs, the trance being taken for possession by some deity.

The most interesting of the various sects into which Shintoism is divided is the Kurozumi, which shows some resemblance to our own mental healing. Its founder, *Kurozumi*, was born in 1780 and was from early life remarkable for obedience and piety. The death of his parents caused him such grief that he fell ill, developed consumption, and seemed upon the point of death, when a new thought entered his mind. "Grieving for my parents has filled me with the *inki* ["gloomy spirit"] and made me sick; if now I can imbibe the *yoki* ["cheerful spirit"], my disease will disappear." From that hour he received everything as a blessing from heaven, began to worship the sun, and soon became quite well. Shortly afterward while worshipping the sun at New Year's time, his heart suddenly became pure, and he "laid hold on that life which vivifies the universe." He then took to breathing on the sick and found that he could cure them. The sect of his followers is now large and attributes its success to the healing of diseases. Remarkable cures have certainly been made, and these are widely advertised often with exaggeration, while the failures attract little attention.